

The North Carolina Statewide Transportation Plan

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Statewide Transportation Plan?

The Statewide Transportation Plan ("Plan") is a long-range business plan outlining NCDOT's investment priorities for the next 25 years. The Plan provides estimates of infrastructure needs and available funding, and centers on a new Recommended Investment Scenario.

What is the purpose of the Plan?

The overriding purpose of the Plan is to establish a long-range blueprint for transportation investment in North Carolina. The Plan establishes target levels of spending within three major transportation categories—maintenance/preservation, modernization and expansion—over the next 25 years. The Plan offers a new spending priority that will help address pressing system needs.

How was the Plan developed?

NCDOT has been working to develop this Statewide Transportation Plan since September 2000. The Plan is an update of North Carolina's first Statewide Transportation Plan, completed in 1995, and is mandated by federal law. To ensure that the Plan accurately reflected the needs and input of North Carolina's citizens, NCDOT conducted a vigorous public involvement program to incorporate relevant agencies, key stakeholders and the general public in the development of the Plan. Committees comprised of several Board of Transportation members and key department staff oversaw the development of the Plan.

When was the Plan adopted?

The Plan was approved and adopted by the Board of Transportation on September 2, 2004.

How does the Recommended Investment Scenario work?

The Recommended Investment Scenario proposes targeted levels of spending in the areas of maintenance/preservation, modernization and expansion for all modes of transportation throughout the state. It reflects considerable effort by NCDOT to balance extensive customer feedback, technical analysis findings and management input.

The scenario underscores the importance of safety in all investments and places a focus on upgrading and preserving the state's existing transportation system. It proposes greater investment in the state's highest use facilities and in non-highway modes that

have historically received a disproportionately low percentage of the state's transportation funding. The scenario represents investment from a statewide, system-oriented analysis. Investment does not target specific projects, but rather emphasizes areas where the Department should invest its dollars to achieve system-wide improvement goals.

How do the Plan recommendations and investment scenario correspond with the *North Carolina Moving Ahead!* initiative?

The Plan and the *North Carolina Moving Ahead!* initiative are separate planning activities, but they address the same types of transportation needs throughout the state. The results of this Plan's technical needs analysis, coupled with public input, point to the need to invest more in infrastructure modernization (widening narrow lanes and bridges, safety improvements, shoulder upgrades, traffic improvements, access management, etc.) and maintenance/preservation activities (shoulder repairs, resurfacing, transit bus replacement, guardrail replacement, etc.). *Moving Ahead!* is an immediate, short-term investment strategy designed to address some of those needs now. However, over the longer term, the 25-year investment strategy in the Plan will likely reflect a more in-depth investment in these types of improvements.

Does the Plan address all of NC's major transportation needs? Are there other sources of revenue or additional bond money that will be used to implement projects from the categories in the scenario?

The Plan is not a remedy to fix all of North Carolina's transportation needs, in fact total NC needs over the next 25 years total to \$84 billion (in constant dollars). Available revenue over a 25-year period totals to \$55 billion (in constant dollars). The Recommended Scenario does not address the nearly \$30 billion shortfall. Other sources of revenue, through changes in existing sources or through the creation of new revenue sources must be considered if North Carolina wants to keep pace with future demand.

If the Plan has a 25-year timeline, how long will it take to actually see results on the ground? What if our transportation needs change five years from now? Will we update this Plan or amend this investment direction and seek another?

The Recommended Investment Scenario adopted for the Plan depicts the investment by mode and category of improvement needed to achieve desired results (better pavement conditions, less congestion, safer arterials, new passenger rail, etc.) over a 25-year period. It will be NCDOT's responsibility to implement the Plan, which will start by pursuing greater legislative funding flexibility and lead to a re-examination of projects in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Department's seven-year blueprint

for new transportation projects. This will take time, and possibly more than one TIP cycle before tangible changes in project selection are achieved.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has published regulations that require state transportation plans to be updated frequently (a five-year update cycle is typical). This allows states to build upon previous work and revise their plans in response to changing conditions. For North Carolina, we have recommended a four-year update cycle, with data being refreshed every two years.

How does the Recommended Investment Scenario affect the Equity Formula? How will future shifts in transportation investment be equally dispersed throughout the state? Will we develop a new formula? Do we need legislation to do this?

Investment levels in the Recommend Investment Scenario were not constrained based on current legislative requirements or other allocations such as the Equity Formula. Full implementation of a revised North Carolina transportation investment strategy will require policy and/or legislative changes. Current legislative requirements governing transportation programming in North Carolina will make implementation challenging. Greater funding flexibility is one of the key action steps needed to realize the Plan's full potential. Upon adoption, the Department must move forward and work with decision-makers to consider the most appropriate changes necessary to achieve full Plan implementation.

Will the Division Offices and local/regional areas have the flexibility to determine how to spend their "modernization" dollars? How will projects be chosen and who will prioritize? What if a rural area wants to exchange their share of "modernization" dollars for an equivalent amount of "expansion" dollars?

The degree of flexibility afforded to Division Offices and local areas is determined by how NCDOT shapes its project selection process. A centralized programming process would establish criteria for the consideration of projects and then use a flexible approach to prioritize projects within each Division. The programming process should be designed to facilitate efficient implementation of the Plan.

How much "expansion" money is really being curtailed in this proposal? Are we promising to finish what we've got in the TIP? For example, does this mean the 5-mile bypass on my local area's Transportation Plan will never be built?

The Recommended Investment Scenario allocates nearly \$15 billion in base year revenues to highway expansion, which is a considerable share. It is possible that NCDOT will review the funded and unfunded projects in the TIP to ensure they still reflect the highest priority projects.

A new emphasis on modernization and maintenance/preservation does mean fewer new location/expansion projects will be programmed in the future, unless new revenues become available. In the short term, the Department's current TIP commitments will continue to advance. However, in the long-term, increased investment in modernization and maintenance/preservation activities will serve to improve the operational efficiency and capacity of existing highways, thereby achieving some level of congestion relief similar to a new highway. This change in programming direction will require NCDOT to make use of additional technical tools to evaluate its projects and program those that yield the highest level of benefits for North Carolina's citizens.

How will we monitor our progress towards implementing this Recommended Investment Scenario? Will we get reports on what has been achieved and what is left to complete?

The Plan recommends NCDOT prepare periodic reports to its customers regarding its accomplishments and progress toward implementing the Recommended Investment Scenario. At a minimum, performance measures should be established for program delivery, use of state and federal funds and overall system performance. Such monitoring establishes a strong credibility/accountability link between the Department and its customers.

Overall, will this Plan put rural areas at a disadvantage while simultaneously helping urban areas or vice versa?

No. This is neither an urban nor rural plan—it is a blueprint for statewide transportation investment across North Carolina. Implementation of the Plan will take regional differences into account and recognize that certain types of improvements are more critical in some areas than others. Implementation could also occur along a “tiered approach” or in a “regionally-specific” fashion.

What can the public and our local constituents expect as a result of implementing this scenario? What changes should they expect to see in their transportation system?

With the adoption of this Plan, NCDOT is changing the way it does business. It is bringing all transportation modes to the financial table, listening to what its customers want and using technical data to guide its investment strategy. Full Plan implementation will result in a safer, more modern, and better-maintained transportation system. Citizens

can expect upgraded highways, smoother pavement, new bridges and numerous safety improvements such as wider shoulders and improved intersections. In addition, a higher level of investment in public transportation, rail passenger, rail freight, intelligent transportation systems, ferries and bicycle/pedestrian facilities should yield a system that provides more choices, experiences fewer service reductions, makes better use of technology and recognizes the role of passenger and freight mobility in the state's economy.